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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
IRANIAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Narrator: Sir George Middleton

Date: October 14, 1985

Place: London

Interviewer: Habib Ladjevardi

Tape no: 1

Q. Sir George, if we could begin by asking you to just give a little bit of a personal background about yourself.

A. Well, I was basically brought up in France in the first part of my career. I then had to learn English, which I succeeded in doing. I was at school in Layton <?>, England, then Oxford University. Then I did a doctorate in Germany and a doctorate in Spain. Then my father decided I'd better start working.

So I went into the diplomatic service. And served in South America, North America, Italy, Poland, Rumania -- where the war caught up with me, and I was interned in Italy. And back on my old run of Europe and North America. At the end of the war, I was at the embassy in Washington. And then came back to London to be head of personnel and administration. Which

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was interesting after the war, because one was turning parachute colonels and turning them into vice-consuls.

And having done about three and a half years of that, it was time to go abroad again, and it was almost impossible to find any place to send me. Because I had read the personal files of all the heads of missions, and when my name was suggested, they said, "That fellow? Never! He's read my file." Then we found a bachelor who had no history. He was ambassador in Iran. And that's how I became a Middle Easterner. And I never got out again.

Q. Who was the ambassador at that time?

A. Sir Francis Shepherd <sp?> was ambassador at that time. As I say, he was a bachelor with an impeccable history, I'd say. Nothing of ... his personal file was about a millimeter thick. And when they said, "Will you have Middleton as your Number Two?", he said, "Never heard of him. Why not?" And that was it.

Shortly afterwards, he was moved. And of course the Iranian government refused to receive another ambassador, so I was left in charge of the embassy for the next 18 months or so, until the rupture in relations on the 1st of November, '52.

Q. Let me ask you this: before you left London for Tehran,



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what were really your sources of data and information? And what sort of impressions did you have about Iran and the people, the political conditions which you would be meeting once you got there?

A. Ridiculous as it may seem, I had virtually none, because I had been European and American all my career until then. Let's say, for the previous 20 years. I was in Australia -- on holiday in Australia -- when I got the news that I was going to Tehran. So I went to the local bookstore, bought everything I could find, including a Persian grammar, sailed from Melbourne to Abadan, in a BP tanker, and all I learned was in those four weeks reading on an empty tanker.

And at least picked up enough Farsi to be able to say, "How do you do?" and "What time of day is it?" and so on, when I got there. So, it was really learning the hard way by jumping straight into the deep end of the swimming pool.

I suppose that anyone with sort of a broad European culture has a fairly good idea of Persian history -- he must have -- it's part of our history, as well. And, having been brought up in France, I was perfectly familiar with Lettres

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Persanes and all the rest of it. For that matter, Omar

Khayyam was a part of the English heritage, almost, now.

And, as my minister on various occasions, Anthony Eden, was a Persian scholar, one picked up a little. He always claimed

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that he read Hafiz before going to sleep, and so, if only to look like one's minister, one pretended that one also read Hafiz before going to sleep at night.

But it was.... No, I would say, on the political conditions, not an awful lot.

Q. When did you actually arrive?

A. I arrived there in January, '51.

Q. '51 -- so, Razmara was....

A. Razmara ... he was still ... he became prime minister just afterwards. He became prime minister, didn't he, about the first of February, or something like that? I think. He was murdered when I was there.

Q. That's right. He had become prime minister the year before.

A. He'd become prime minister the end of '50. (unclear)

Q. Early in '50. And then he was prime minister for about a year.

A. About a year... and so, ...

Q. He was murdered in '51.

A. In '51, that's right. It happened when I was there.

No. What one.... One went there, obviously having been briefed by one's government, what one.... Well, I had an ambassador ... as the Number Two, as the councillor of the embassy, I had a fairly good idea of what our objective was. It was basically to maintain good relations with Iran, to ensure that we still had access to crude oil, and -- what was very important to us in those days -- was that that crude oil was paid for in Sterling. So really: maintain good relations, maintain access to oil, maintain that oil, if possible, in Sterling. That was the three obvious <?>.

And, of course, it was a time of a change of government in Britain, anyway. Halfway through the oil crisis, we changed from a Socialist government to a Conservative one. Though I don't think that that changed a great deal, in the sense that perhaps, in a way, I should say the Conservative government had a better feeling of the historical background. Certainly the Socialists were far more aggressive. They were the ones that wanted military intervention.

And it's recorded in cabinet papers. It was Morris Knudson and company who wanted.... As good Socialists, they were

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willing to get on their horses and go charging across Khuzestan, and occupying oil fields, and things like that, which with the change of government, I'm glad to say, all became a bit more ... a bit cooler. A bit calmer.

Q. So you say most of the, so to of, political knowledge that's required, you acquired once you got to Tehran?

A. Political.... I was aware, of course, like everyone else, of the economic and, if you like, the oil background. I had been on the ... busy on oil all through the war, so I'd known all the American, British and other oil companies. And when I was on the Civil Affairs Committee at the Pentagon in Washington, I was a member of the POL, the Persian Oil and Lubricants Committee. I'd been through all the various crises -- every morning it was a disaster, every evening was fine. Day after day.

And so, I knew some of the politics of oil. And something of the technology of oil -- the supply problem. But what you learn on a military committee, and what you have to apply later in diplomatic-political life, is quite different, of course.

Q. Would you say that was a reason for your choice? For the post?

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A. I suppose it must have had some influence, yes. I'd been in ... involved in oil. I'd been involved in oil in Poland, in Argentina, and so on. I'd been in oil countries. And I'd spent three or four years in the United States, and familiar with that side of the picture. Very important.

Q. At the embassy, how are the responsibilities divided between the ambassador and ...?

A. Well, the ambassador is the ambassador and, of course, he's the head of the mission, and he alone speaks with the voice of his government. Under him, he usually has a Number Two, who is usually a political advisor; an economic or commercial advisor; and quite often a cultural one, if there's a cultural mission, like the British Council, or anything else -- or an American center there. And then the rest are variously language experts -- almost everyone, I'm glad to say, at the British Embassy in Tehran in those days spoke Farsi.

And really the ambassador sits as the judge in these matters, and he alone delivers judgment or speaks for his government. When he goes, it falls upon Number Two. And of course there's a military attache -- military and air attaches. Only we didn't have a naval attache.

Q. Was there an intelligence officer, too, at the time, or

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does that come later?

A. There were specialist officers, yes, who covered that aspect of things. Who were known and declared to the Iranian government. I mean, there were no secret operations conducted. In fact, in a friendly country, we would never do that.

Q. Because I was told by one of your colleagues that, in later years, the man who was in charge of intelligence would have regular audiences with the Shah, and I was wondering if during that time there was such a post and such a relationship.

A. Not really. The man who was a specialist in Iranian affairs, and spoke Farsi, <unclear> -- not that speaking Farsi made any difference -- yes, he saw ... he was occasionally received by the Shah, and privately.

But it's not really the style of British diplomacy. We don't really like intelligence officers talking to the head of government or head of state. If they wish to talk to other intelligence officers, that's their business -- that's what they're there for. But personally, as ambassador, I would not want an intelligence officer running around.

<interruption for telephone>



As I was saying about the role of an intelligence officer, I.... When it comes to operational matters: his Iranian contacts, and one thing and another, then he's on his own, and I suppose the average ambassador doesn't want to know about the details....

When it comes to policy, talking to heads of government, heads of state, then, in my view (and I would almost certainly insist upon it), it's the head of the mission, it's the ambassador, who's entitled to know what's going on. And it's really his job and not anybody else's. Even in economic matters -- one would not expect the economics man to start negotiations or anything without the head of mission knowing, and being fully informed. I think this is very important.

It is slightly different in the United States, where there is perhaps more rivalry, more free enterprise, between the intelligence side and the political side. Especially as the political side, ambassadors, are not always professionals -- they can be political appointees. Whereas, in the British foreign service, the vast majority, almost a hundred percent, of ambassadors are professionals. It makes a slightly different approach.

Q. Now, to get back to when you arrived in Iran. At that moment, was there a feeling of crisis as far as oil

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negotiations were concerned? I mean, did you have any inkling at the time that things would lead within a few months to nationalization, and such a change in Iranian -- in government policies, and so on?

A. No, I don't think so. My first stop was in Abadan, where I spent the first two days there, with the oil company, and the general manager, and so on. And in those days it was Eric Drake. And, yes, one felt a feeling of tension. One felt a feeling that there was a good deal of political unrest. I don't think it was particularly labor unrest, but political unrest. And the supplementary agreement had been hanging around and hanging around.

And, from the point of view of the management of the oil company, it was very hard to know where they were going to be in six months or a year. And, as it's an industry which requires long-term planning and long-term investment, yes, one could sense a certain unhappiness in Abadan.

And then, of course, when I got to Tehran, there was the whole question... I started reading and being briefed, and then of course the whole thing became very clear very soon. And matters were moving very fast the whole time, not only in Iran, but outside.

Because ... I can't remember without reference the exact



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timing, but the ARAMCO deal had just about been signed, with that absolutely splendid formula of 50-50. One of the most brilliant pieces of public relations ever done, because no one ever said what 100 was! But it was a wonderful idea. It was like the man who abolished first, second, and third class, and had economy, tourist, and so on. Vocabulary can be very important. And 50-50 was ... it meant that everyone, all oil-producing states, were looking for something new.

It's a curious reflection that, some years later, when I was Resident in the Gulf, and went to see old Sheikh Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi. And one of the things I wanted to do was to get him to ... modernize the oil agreement. And of course he was a very, very -- and still is, I think he's still alive -- a very conservative creature. And he said, "What I've got, I keep. And if it says 'one shilling a barrel,' I want one shilling a barrel. I refuse to change it!" That was when we were offering a lot more, by that time -- some years later.

But obviously things were changing very fast -- had to change. I think that the change of government in the middle of it all in Britain was not particularly helpful. It led to a certain break in thinking and in the negotiations. And I suppose, you know, unfortunately, the ... I think there was every possibility of an agreement, had there been a little bit more elasticity, a little bit more imagination, on

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both sides. I do not think that the breakdown, when it happened, was necessary.

Q. How about staying with affairs when Razmeh was prime minister for a few more minutes. At that time, did you take seriously the idea that oil was going to be nationalized? Or did you consider this something that the minority of the political <?> was discussing? I mean, how seriously was that <?> taken at the time? That incident?

A. Well, I think it was taken seriously, depending on which quarter was ... some people did not take it seriously at all.

Q. You, yourself.

A. I thought it was certainly a possibility. It seemed a likelihood. Where I think the diplomats and the politicians were ill-informed by the technicians, who kept on assuring the other people that it would be impossible, because the Persians were incapable of running the industry. They would all blow up -- the most ridiculous things would happen. And not one word of this turned out to be true. But one is misled by experts, and when experts assure one of these sort of things, one has to believe a great deal....

Q. You mean, the people of the company were telling you ...?

A. People of the company, people outside, experts, were all saying, "They're quite incapable of running the industry."

Since there had been training programs in Abadan -- and very advanced ones -- for 20 or 30 years, it seemed curious that in all that time they'd not produced a few engineers -- which they of course had done. Also, as we know, it's very hard to blow up an oilfield -- in fact, it's virtually impossible. We tried it during the war in Rumania and places, and the amount of damage is absolutely minimal. So that I think we were misled by that sort of opinion.

And, of course, only half the reality was taking place in Iran. The other half was taking place in Washington and other places, in London, and so on. Because the jealousy between the major producers and marketers of oil was very fierce -- it always is. And I don't think it is a particular secret or anything to say that -- seeing BP get a bloody nose did not cause any pain to the other producers of oil at all. In fact, there was one less.

If I'd been president of a major oil company, it wouldn't have caused me any great pain. Some of them said, "Oh my God, if it happens to them, it'll happen to all of us!" So that they were a little bit nervous. They didn't want.... They were all talking very much more about the sanctity of

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contracts than they were about what might happen to the shareholders of BP. Which I think is.....

Q. If there had been a greater genuine concern by the other oil companies, perhaps things could have been ~~unclear~~

A. Yes. Yes, I think so. I think there were so many false factors in the equation, I don't see how anyone can get to the answer.

First of all, there was a lot of jealousy -- commercial jealousy -- between the major people. Which was quite obvious once one got there. There was misinformation about whether the Iranians could run their own industry, whether it required all this mysterious high technology. The answer is, "Of course they could." But we were told that they could not. There was certainly real fear on the British side that the dollar strain, if it changed from sterling to dollars, could be quite serious. Financially and politically. Those are the sort of factors.

Then also, of course, atomic energy was just coming in around. And I remember going to a seminar, round about 19 -- -- just before going to Iran, round about 1950 -- at a very confidential level, in which we were seriously told that by 1980, I think it was -- or 1985 -- we wouldn't need oil. Just a little bit, for motorcars, because it was easier to

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transport, but that 45, 55, 65 percent of our energy would be met from atomic sources. And the rest from coal. And it would be nice to have some crude oil.

Of course there was also the idea in those days -- and it's only 30-odd, 35 years ago -- as to what was and was not available in crude oil resources in the world also proved totally wrong. I mean, at a dollar a barrel, there wasn't too much available in the world. But <at> 30 dollars a barrel, it comes out of Alaska, the North Sea, and even, which we were told was geologically impossible, Australia. Nothing is geologically impossible.

Q. There's a great sort of a mystery over this so-called proposal that Razmara was supposed to be carrying in his pocket at the time that he was assassinated. This has been told to me by some of his ministers, that he had said he had a proposal in his pocket, and "he'd never told us about it and then he was assassinated." But in the Granada Series there was some reference to a so-called 50-50 proposal having been passed on to Razmara before he was assassinated. Could you put some light on this?

A. Yes. I think that we were still stuck with the text of the supplementary agreement. This was one of the problems. It had become a sort of holy text, and all we were doing was playing around with it.



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Yes, I think that the ARAMCO 50-50 having become public knowledge, that there was a move towards modifying the supplementary agreement in that regard. I think that.... Frankly, without looking it up, I can't remember what the broad outlines of that agreement were. But my recollection is that it was more of a profit-sharing arrangement than any other, and moved away a bit from.... There was a basic royalty, and then profit-sharing.

The problem with profit-sharing is that it can be structured in any way you like, from zero up to a large amount. Because, as we all know in the oil industry, you can take it at the extraction, you take it at refining, you can take it at transportation, or at the pump. It doesn't matter. You can take it anywhere. You can take it at all the other operations.

Most oil companies 30 years ago made no money on transportation. They made a great deal out of refining. Today, refining is a headache, and no one makes any money out of refining. Surplus, and we don't know what to do with it. At the pump, it's mostly governments that make money at the pump now, rather than oil companies.

But you can take profits anywhere, so how can you come to an agreement with the primary producer, saying you'll split the

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profits? Profits of what? I think this is where the thing became very complicated.

Really the only simple way in an industrial process is to take it at the point of sale. But you can hardly see the Iranian government splitting with a British government sales in a Yorkshire service station. This is the problem, I think. And this is why, you know, it's again a good public relations idea to move toward 50-50, but profit-sharing, and trying to define 100, perhaps calculating differently the 50-50 split, is almost intolerable. It's almost impossible.

Q. But the reason people talk about this agreement in Razmara's pocket is because they're assuming that, if that proposal had become public knowledge and had been presented to the Majles, perhaps it could have broken the deadlock as it was seen at that moment. Was there such an important proposal? Or was it just another in the series of proposals?

A. I think it was only another. I don't think it was, in itself, a new initiative. I think it was -- I'll come back to it -- I think it's only a refinement of the supplemental agreement. The general feeling as far as I'm aware -- certainly mine was -- that never, never would it get through the Majles.

I think if Razmara was murdered, it was because it was

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believed that if he had done a deal with the British, it would be ... the Majles would be dissolved, or something like that, and the agreement would just be declared. I think that one of the -- again, I'd have to refer -- but one of my recollections is that the deal would have involved a fairly substantial down payment as an advance on future financial adjustments, and so on.

And this, of course, would have been attractive because the Iranian government needed some money at the time. We're talking of figures which today seem ridiculous, but, you know, it was only a few million pounds, probably, which today, as I say, is nothing, but in those days it was quite a lot of money, multiplied by a factor of ten. And it would have helped, certainly.

Q. There was also some reference about financial aid being given to Razmara sort of under the table, if I may use that expression, which he was not acknowledging publicly.

A. Well, I think that a fairly simplistic view was taken on both sides of the negotiating table, that any agreement which would get the consent of the Majles would cost money. And that a lot of people would have to be made happy -- personally -- and I think this was misjudging the public emotion at the time. And certainly the Majles feeling. Yes. Fifty years earlier one could probably have bought an



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agreement, but I don't think in 1951 it was possible.

Q. I was referring more to sort of ... advances toward the government treasury....

A. Yes. I see. I think there undoubtedly was.

Q. How were they able to hide such ... if they were getting X million dollars, and it was going into the treasury, how could this be kept ...?

A. They never got it.

Q. They never....

A. They never got it. This was part of the proposal.

Q. I see. So Razmara, while he was prime minister, he never....

A. He never received it -- never received it.

Q. I see. OK.

A. It was also because, you see, this proposal came up again, by the time the ambassador had left, and I was in charge. It came up with Moezadeh. Because he said to me on

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one occasion, "Let me have five million pounds (or something, whatever it was), and we can settle it all." And I said, "You must mean tomanas." He said, "No, pounds. You have pounds. Give me pounds." I said, "What are you going to do with it, Prime Minister?" "I shall pay the police, and all the sort of things that haven't been done." And I said, "The police are not going to accept pound notes. They will have to have tomanas. And it's going to be...."

"There is an actual mechanical difficulty in changing one money into another money. It has to go through the treasury.... Nowadays, with added inflation, all sorts of things. You'd have to print the notes, and so on." And he....

One of the weaknesses of Mossadegh, of whom I was very fond, is of course he did not understand anything about finance. He was a charming, conservative farmer, who was growing apples, and being paid nothing per bushel, and seeing them sold in the streets at a dollar a pound. And he went mad. He said, "This cannot happen. I am being robbed. Not only I am being robbed, the nation is being robbed of something which is a non-renewable source of wealth and...."

And then we had one great discussion on the subject of (because he used to sell milk, too) the difference between having a cow, and being in the dairy business. And I was

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trying to explain that I wanted the milk in a bottle -- we didn't have cartons -- in a bottle at my doorstep every morning, pasteurized and ready to drink. And, in fact, I had a cow in the mountains, and it didn't make any difference, really, because someone else would have a cow -- there was competition.

And it was very expensive from the cow to the kitchen. A lot of things had to be done. He found this very hard to accept -- this sort of analogy. Then we got into profit again. I said, "You know, profit from the cow and the kitchen. Again it will be taken at the delivery, and the carton, it will be taken at all sorts of different places, not just ... at the cow." It was almost total incomprehension on both sides, I'm afraid.

And I suppose that, yes, there was a considerable fear that a bad ... what the oil companies regard as a bad example in Iran, would have very wide repercussions elsewhere. We'd already had Mexico -- nationalization in Mexico. And didn't want to see it happen ten more times.

Q. Again turning back to Razmara. At least among Iranian circles, there's still a great mystery about his assassination. And the same questions, or the same accusations, which were made at that time: that maybe the Court of the Shah, and Mr. Alam, had something to do with his

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assassination. Still in Iran -- what is it now? -- 35 years later, as I interview people they still make the same accusations and suspicions and so on. Is there anything you can tell me which would clear up the history a little better than it is right now?

Was there any kind of a conspiracy that you were aware of in assassinating Razmara?

A. Not that I'm aware of, at all, no. I can't remember whether Hossein Ala was minister of Court -- yes, he was minister of Court at that time, had been prime minister -- he certainly, as minister of Court, I do not think was capable of having thought up or organized such a thing.

Asadollah Alam is a little bit different. He, after all, was very, very close to the Shah, and a very powerful person. And more in touch than anyone else, I suppose, with the feeling in the Majles -- with ground-roots political feeling, if you like. But I can see no object in this coming from the Court or from Alam.

It was believed, rightly or wrongly, that the Court, and the Shah, and prime minister wanted the agreement -- wanted an agreement. For lots of reasons. The White Revolution had to go on. Financial stability was important. And an oil agreement was one of the ways of getting it. I don't really

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think that could have been the case. If anyone wanted to have him out of the way, it would be an extreme nationalist, who would not want an agreement.

And at a time when there was already some criticism of the Shah going on at the time ... and, I think, the view that a more ... a less autocratic form of government was desirable. I don't see any conspiracy by the Court or the Shah at all in this.

Q. What do you make of the argument that the Shah was ... never really felt comfortable with a strong figure, and that Razmara was certainly a strong figure, and the accusation that Razmara, in his mind, was sort of thinking of himself as a sort of Kemal Ataturk, or something like that?

A. That is the most credible explanation, if one wants one. But I very much doubt whether the Shah, or the Court, had the necessary willpower to go from there to arrange an assassination. I do not think they were organized for that. I do not think they had the -- to put it in common English -- the guts to go ahead and do it -- or intestinal fortitude -- whatever one likes to call it.

Yes, the Shah certainly was not happy with a very strong character. He hated being pushed towards decisions. He liked to float along, and hope that somehow it would come

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right, and moving a little bit from right and left, and nationalists and less-nationalists, and everything would be fine. He was not a strong character, and therefore he certainly didn't want a strong character around him. Unless he'd been totally dominated. And there was no one to dominate him.

Q. How about Razmara himself? I've read many US Department documents, and some British documents; each of them accuse him -- Razmara -- of being a Russian tool, a British tool, English tool -- I mean, everybody seems to be sort of suspicious about this man. And to this day, we don't know really what were his allegiances, and whose side was he on. Would you have any thoughts on that?

A. That he was widely rumored (a popular and easy one) ... that he was a Russian tool -- I never believed it, I couldn't really see why he would be. The Russians, after all, were far more of an immediate threat after Azarbaijan and so on, than anyone else in the neighborhood.

No, I think that he was, as far as I know -- and I really didn't know him -- why he was the first person who was prepared, whatever he had secretly in his pocket, to push for the supplementary agreement, when most people thought it was virtually impossible to get it through the Majles, why he accepted that position, which he had, more or less, I don't



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know.

Whether he felt that the system of government where the prime minister was really not governing the country, unless he was a very strong one.... I think he thought he could govern the country. And that if he could get this out of the way, he could turn his attention to a great many other things. And that without the oil and the financial security of an oil agreement, he really could not start any reforms. Which, I think, would have gone, in their way, a lot further than some of the reforms that the Shah himself was anxious to carry out.

Whether he ever had the full confidence of the Shah, I don't know.

Q. Do you remember your reaction to the news that the assassination had taken place? Were you in Tehran at the time?

A. I was in Tehran at the time, yes. I remember very well.

Q. How did the news reach you -- radio or telephone or ...?

A. I was early in the morning, wasn't it?

Q. I don't know. He was going to a mosque for a memorial

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service.

A. He was going to a memorial service at a mosque, yes. I think I must have heard it at the embassy, almost immediately after. There was a huge crowd in the street, and of course one knew instantly from people in the street.

No, I think one felt ... wondered who would take his place. One wondered what the next move.... I think people were very frightened of a Tudeh coup at that point. That was probably the biggest single fear. Because there was no other organized party in the country, really. I think among the western embassies, and so on, yes, the immediate feeling was that unless very strong measures were taken instantly, there would be a Tudeh coup. And that, of course, alarmed most people.

Q. What would have been, sort of the reaction of...? What sort of steps -- or action -- would the British ambassador take at a point like this? Would he sort of consult with the Shah to see who should be the next prime minister...?

A. Oh, no! Good gracious no!

Q. How would that work?

A. Well, no. What would happen, I think, immediately after



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that, and did happen, I think, most of the Western ambassadors would either meet, or talk, or telephone, have coffee together. Share their opinions: what happens next? And it's quite likely that the Shah would have sent for one or two of them, separately.

Q. Did he do that?

A. Yes. I think he saw ... I seem to remember him seeing the American, British, and, I think, the Russian, ambassadors -- separately.

Q. <unclear>

A. Yes. But I think he probably did.

In the situation in Iran 35 years ago, that would have been almost normal, after all. The memories of the war and the occupation were not far behind, and he certainly didn't want -- the Shah certainly did not want -- any further foreign interference in his country. If there was outside fear of a breakdown of government, it might make such interference a bit more likely, and his first ... He and his advisors, the first thing they would do, is assure certain ambassadors that everything was under control.

But, as I told you, I can't see him ever, in spite of all the

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bazaar rumors, saying, "Who do you think the next prime minister would be?" I don't ... the Shah would never have done that.

Q. Not even at that stage of his life?

A. I don't think so. No. I don't think so, not even at that stage.

Q. That's interesting.

A. Much more likely .... If anything of that kind happened, he was much more likely to have asked Hossein Ala to make some ... said, "Ask some of your foreign friends, some of the ambassadors, if they have any views." But he would never do it directly. I never (unclear).

Q. Of course then, the appointment of Hossein Ala must have been rather reassuring, at least to someone who....

A. Oh, yes. Old Westminster boy, and everything, yes. You know he was educated at Westminster School, here. I told the headmaster that -- my boy was there -- he wouldn't believe it. And I said, "Look at the records." He was.

No. He was a great man, and a great gentleman, but ... to expect him to become a dictator in a time of crisis was

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totally misreading his character and nature.

Q. This is....?

A. Ala.

Q. Ala, yes.

A. He ... was made to be what he was, which was confidential advisor to the sovereign. He was very good at that, because he had no great passions, he was a man of culture and moderation. And I would think a very good advisor to the sovereign. For the courtier is usually a bad prime minister. The courtiers spend too much time saying, "bafarma'id" (being subservient) and so on, for them to really hit the table hard and strongly.

Q. Was it obvious from the beginning that this would be sort of a caretaker government?

A. I would think so, yes. From the beginning.... He was not really a strong political character. There were many others coming along.

Q. Did you have any wishes as to who would ... sort of most help resolve the crisis, if ... he became prime minister?

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A. No. No, I don't think so. I think we were too preoccupied with trying to get.... All one wanted was someone who was strong enough politically to be able to speak to the Majles and control the Majles when the time came to solve the oil crisis. I think we were feeling great relief that Ala had taken over as a caretaker government, because this was not Tudeh-ism.

Again, I think there was a great cloud of Tudeh hanging over everyone. Again, on looking back, one has no idea whether this was a bogeyman or true.

Q. I was going to ask you about that, because.....

A. I've always been of the opinion that it was more of a bogeyman than anything else, except that -- look at the facts and figures -- it's the most organized party, the only party with, if you like, real ingrained and firm convictions, which knew what they wanted to do, right or wrong. They had money. And they had grass-roots organization. No one else had. There were 300 other parties, all going in different directions. There was still a strong autonomous and provincial movement.

I.... Yes, you see a Communist party with all the strength that a Communist party has when in a vacuum. It's the strongest party. Whether that necessarily means it'd take

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over, I don't know. The social structure of Iran in 1950 was not, I should have thought, really very favorable to a Communist takeover. A Communist takeover demands a certain structure which you can take over, and which commands the country. You only need a handful of people to do it. You can do it with a trades union, you can do it with all sorts of things.

But in a country which, at that time, was suffering from severe economic problems, where there were quite strong provincial and autonomous feelings still, with any fairly strong man who arose, 10 others got up and opposed him. It's not really a Communist scene, that one. You could have a very strong administration, where you could have three secretaries who come in and take the post office, and aviation, and something else, and you've got it done. That did not exist in Iran.

Q. What did you make of the oil strike in Abadan during Ala's premiership? Was that something purely technical in the sense that it was just some spontaneous grievances that were being vented, or did that have to do with the Communist...?

A. No, that I think was ... like nearly all such worker movements, it was very strongly influenced by Communists. Because, if one analyzed the working situation in Abadan,

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yes, any large work force has grievances, but they probably had fewer grievances than any work force in Iran at the time. They had most of the facilities of life, anything from, you know, reasonably good housing, reasonably good education and hospitals, assured employment, and all the rest of it.

They had really fewer things: they wanted more say in management. I think they wanted more nationalization in the sense of more senior people in management, and so on, which is natural. But it was not an industrial dispute, really. Politically, yes, it was certainly.... I think there's little doubt that it was pushed ahead by Tudeh elements there.

Which again does not necessarily mean that it was ripe for a Tudeh takeover. They're clever people -- they exploit legitimate grievances. But sometimes, when those grievances are satisfied, they cease being Communists. Which I think is probably the way it was in Abadan at the time.

Q. What do you remember about the rise of Mossadeq to the occasion and his selection as prime minister, and your own reactions to events as they evolved?

A. Well, it had been coming along, of course. He was known as a sort of rather wild old man -- after all he was not young. He'd been in the government 35 years earlier, or



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something like that. And here was this somewhat eccentric gentleman coming out of the hills ... like a sort of Robinson Crusoe figure almost.

I must say I had a great affection for him. I spent goodness knows how many hours -- we did not need an interpreter because he spoke perfect French -- and I don't think I ever had.... Oh, we used to have tremendous arguments, but honestly he was a person that one could talk to. He was a highly civilized gentleman.

I always doubted his ability, ultimately, to rule the country. But at least he talked sense. He knew where he wanted to go; what he lacked was the technical knowledge to do it. If he'd come up with a well-structured financial plan, he could have got away with it. But he did not have the technical knowledge. And it's a sad thing when people come to power with no background -- they tend to lose.

I was in Egypt with Nasser. If Nasser had had the right technical knowledge, he'd have had a much more successful revolution than he had. But when he was sitting in the trenches of El Arish, he had not planned the government, not planned the philosophy of government. He simply saw corruption and got rid of it. And then said, "Well, God, I'm in power, what do I do now?" He didn't really know.

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And I suspect that Mossadegh was ... again, he was against corruption, wanted to modernize the country. I think he had serious doubts about some of the reforms sponsored by the Shah. I think he could see the dangers of -- as a good farmer -- the depopulation of the agricultural countryside. He'd foreseen the sort of shantytowns which are one of the diseases of a country becoming industrialized. And therefore you have a dissatisfied urban proletariat with no roots and no technical background.

Q. Is this something he talked about?

A. Oh, yes. I always thought that you distribute the land, and the person who has a limited education and technical ability finds himself with a piece of paper. But he hasn't got water, seed, or marketing organization. And what the hell does he do with a piece of paper? After a time, he drifts into the town, with his children, and they become urban unemployed.

You see, when I was there, the population of Tehran was 750,000, something like that. What is it today -- 7 million? This is the sort of social consequences which need very careful planning and thought if one's to avoid <them> in the process of industrialization.

And it went ahead much too fast with too little thought. And



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I think that Mossadegh is a good.... I always regarded him as a good countryman, rather like a typical English Tory from Derbyshire or something like that. Basically his roots were in the land. And that's why he didn't really understand the oil industry.

But he didn't need to understand the oil industry. If he'd had a bit more technical background, I think he'd have been a very successful leader of the country.

Q. What did you think of his close associates? Which ones did you have any contact with?

A. Well, Kazemi was the one I saw most of, obviously. I thought they were. ...

Q. Kazemi ... Bagher Kazemi?

A. Yes. I thought, unfortunately, they were, on the whole, unqualified.

Q. Bagher Kazemi was one. Who else did you get to know while you were there?

A. Oh, the Interior. ...

Q. Sadighi?

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A. Yes. Sadighi.

Q. What was he like?

A. Well, mostly we were talking about security and so on. I should have thought a fairly good policeman, but I wouldn't have thought he was a man of great ability. Kazemi I thought was a bit thick in most things. I don't think he always understood what he was talking about, unfortunately. I don't wish to be rude about any of these people, but....

Had he had a first-class team, again, I think he had all the makings of being a great and successful leader at a difficult time. I think he and the Shah would have been almost the most difficult relationship to have sorted out, because each would have been very jealous of the privileges of the other. But, with a technocrat team behind him, I think he could have succeeded.

Q. Was there anyone in his group, or in his associates, that you had greater confidence in?

A. No, I had more confidence in ... I saw more of him than anyone else. And I had great confidence in him, ultimately, if we could only get around a table and talk seriously, we could come to an agreement. I thought that some of the

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senior employees, Iranian employees, at Abadan.... The senior man there was ... a senior Iranian?

Q. Fallah?

A. Yes.

Q. Reza Fallah.>

A. Yes. He had all the knowledge, and was a very good technician, and could have been a very useful technician. And he understood it all. He was not particularly politically motivated. And I think in the....

It was difficult, in all honesty, in 1950, '51, '52, to find technocrats with the necessary knowledge who were not politically motivated, because you don't want political motivation -- not too much political motivation -- in a situation of that kind, which was pre-revolutionary.

And, of course, most of the old-fashioned deputies, and so on, one spoke to, they had the Tudeh complex just as much as the western observers.

Q. They were afraid of a Tudeh takeover?

A. Yes. And seeing some of their privileges going, and so

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on. And then you had the old gang hanging around. I mean, again, what contribution people like the Gharagozlou's, and so on -- maintenance of the status quo was all they were looking for, and the glamour of the Court.

Q. Well, it seems, again watching this documentary put out by Granada, that very early on the British government decided that they could not deal with Mossadegh, and they were looking for a replacement. I was surprised by the brevity of the time that they gave, you know, him a chance.

A. Well, it wasn't all that short a time. He ... there was a.... The pressures on him were tremendous. The impatience of Anthony Eden was a major factor in this, I think. I think Anthony Eden was always looking for ... his Falklands, so to speak. What he needed was a natural victory somewhere. And this seemed to him to be the place where he could get it. He tried it later at Suez. Very sad. If there was ever a decision to hasten things unduly, I should think it was his almost psychological problems, that he had. He was already a sick man.

The history of the world so often depends on someone's digestion, or whatever, and this is, I think, one of the cases where....

Q. But it is true that by what? -- June '51? -- steps were

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being taken to destabilize Mossadegh and to build up an opposition, and so on?

A. I wouldn't have thought that.... No, not as early as that. It was well into '52 before, I think, I myself said that I thought he was now becoming almost psychotic and there was no further ... I'd spent about 50 hours, I think, with him by then. Trying to come to some common ground, somewhere. And absolutely -- it got worse and worse as time went on.

I think he was getting very impatient because the financial pressures, economic pressures, were getting very strong. The political pressures inside the Majles were getting stronger and stronger. And I think he was very frightened of a revolution which would have been contrary to his ideas, and much worse than anything that happened.

The Shah was getting less and less determined, less and less able to take a decision. Less and less able to talk to his prime minister. There was no policy -- that was one of the things.

I think the impatience of the British government was that when.... All the various people that went out there, whether it was Averell Harriman, whether it was all the other missions, and so on, they never got a clear idea from

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Mossadegh as to really the limits within which he was prepared to negotiate. And we never, even less, got an idea from the Shah as to which way he wanted to go. None at all.

I mean, you know, "Your Majesty, do you want this prime minister, or do you want another prime minister? Do you want an agreement or don't you want an agreement? Please tell us something, and we will endeavor to accommodate our policy with yours. Please tell us what your policy is. We want an oil agreement, but, at the moment at least, the parameters are too narrow for your government to be able to accommodate such an agreement.... Let us try and set out, almost as mathematically as possible, what the problem is. Then we can talk about it."

And he, you know, he really was very, very difficult.

Q. As of when did the idea that Qavam could become prime minister take shape?

A. I can't remember offhand now who suggested Qavam and how that came along. It's a curious thing in Iran that one always goes back to tradition when anything happens, one always tries to pick out an almost historical character to put things right. And I thought that he was quite mad. I mean, you're going back to before the Pahlavis, before <?> -- you're going back to Persepolis, if you want to do this sort



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of thing. You can't do it.

No. A curious feeling that the return to old monarchical traditions of centralized obedience would work. I thought Qavam was absolutely mad, myself. He had less support politically than anyone I can think of at that time.

Q. But obviously he personally was interested in....

A. Of course. Of course, power interests anyone. But I should have thought he was totally unqualified. I think, then, ... if Qavam had come along ... I don't know if he'd have ... presumably he'd have called out the army and that sort of thing. At that time I really don't know what would have happened. I think it would have been.... There could have been bloodshed -- I think quite a lot. I think the army would have -- yes, would have been perfectly loyal at that time, chances are....

Q. In fact, he was appointed, and he could not....

A. Get a government....

Q. ....deal with the population.

A. He couldn't deal with it, no. But had it stuck at all, I think that he would have had the army out, yes. And then the

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question: would the army have come out? And if so, I think you would have had a sort of September, 1917 in Russia situation. I think there would have been bloodshed. And probably the best chance the Tudeh ever had, if Qavam had come back.

Q. Well, the one hour that you made available has come to an end....

A. Oh, God, yes, I've got to go along.

Q. I do hope that you....

A. Well, listen, when are you...?



# HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
IRANIAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

DIRECTOR: HABIB LADJEVARDI  
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NARRATOR: GEORGE MIDDLETON

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PLACE OF INTERVIEW: LONDON, ENGLAND

INTERVIEWER: HABIB LADJEVARDI

TAPE NO.: 2

RESTRICTIONS: NONE

NARRATOR: MIDDLE MIDDLETON, GEORGE  
TAPE NO.: 02

ALA, HUSSEIN, AS MINISTER OF COURT

ANGELO-IRANIAN OIL COMPANY

CONSTITUTIONALISM

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GHAVAM, AHMAD, BACKGROUND & CHARACTER OF

GHAVAM, AHMAD, RELATIONS WITH THE SHAH

GRADY, HENRY

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IRANIANS, CHARACTER OF

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LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

OIL NATIONALIZATION 1951

PERRON, ERNEST

RAIZADA, GEN. HAJ-ALI, AS PRIME MINISTER

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SHEPHERD, SIR FRANCIS

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TUDEH PARTY

UNITED STATES, POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE

UNITED STATES, ROLE OF IN IRAN'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

ZAVAHAT-NEZHAR-E MELAT-E IRAN PARTY

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
IRANIAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Narrator: Sir George Middleton

Date: October 16, 1985

Place: London

Interviewer: Habib Ladjevardi

Tape no: 2

Q. Sir George, the last time, we sort of talked about some of the events and circumstances prior to the premiership of Dr. Mossadegh, and concluded his government. But this morning I'd like to sort of backtrack a little bit, and begin from the time that he became prime minister. Can you recall under what circumstances, and in what way was it that you heard he had been elected by the Majles or appointed by the Shah?

A. I think "appointed by the Shah" is the right one. Because, as I recall, Qavam had come and gone, Razmara had been assassinated, and then the.... Qavam came back for three days, didn't he?

Q. This was about a year after Mossadegh....

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A. After the first one, yes. After his first appointment.

Q. I'm thinking now right after Razmara was assassinated, Ala became a caretaker prime minister for about a month or so....

A. For about a month or so, that's right.

Q. And, early May, I believe it was, it was proposed -- if I'm not mistaken by Jamal Emami -- in the Majles. From what I understand, not totally seriously. They claimed that they said, "Well, you know, he's proposed nationalization, let's propose him as the person to implement it." And they thought they were sort of trying to send him out to an impossible job.

A. That's exactly right.

Q. Which he took seriously.

A. Which he took seriously. And, I think, indeed, the whole country took seriously. In fact we all did. I don't think that it was regarded altogether as a farce, or which had been done to discredit Mossadegh.

Looking back just a little bit -- back to the assassination of Razmara.... It was, of course, rather curious, thinking it



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over, that he was always regarded by the ... I'm not sure it was just in the street, but many members of the Majles as well, as being an American stooge rather than anything else. And it was the increasing anti-American feeling which was growing up. He was also, of course, regarded as a likely military dictator. And a lot of old and bad memories came back from his father.

And of course there was.... I've also recalled -- thinking back again -- there was at that time beginning to grow up quite a strong republican movement. So the whole question of the future of the monarchy, as well as the oil company, as well as the major industry of Iran, and so on, were all in doubt at that time. And who or why ... Razmeh was assassinated -- by whom or who inspired it.... But he was becoming a very disliked symbol of A) growing American influence, and B) military dictatorship.

I think that, in a way, when Mossadeq was nominated and approved by the Shah, it was almost a relief to a lot of people. It was not suspected that he would be particularly strong, and he'd be able to hold a majority in the Majles together for very long. He'd been given.... He was evidently civilian and unlikely to be a dictator. Lots of good reasons for people feeling more relaxed, and being given an almost impossible task -- as it was then supposed.

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So that I think one would then have expected he would go back to the then familiar pattern of Iranian politics of maneuvering, combinations of parties and power.... Of course there was also some.... Again, thinking back since we last spoke -- the rising influence of Khashani, which had scared a lot of people. It was curious how all these different things combined.

I think Mossadegh was regarded as the only likely person. Gavan had been vastly discredited, Razmara had been assassinated. That assassination also had a profound effect, because, after all, it was only in -- what was it? -- in '49, the attempt on the Shah's life.

Q. February '49.

A. '49. So it was not so long. It was all fresh in people's memory.

Q. There are Iranians who have said that they found the Shah sort of relieved, and even pleased -- with a smile on his face -- when he heard Razmara was shot. Did you...?

A. No, I never had that feeling that the Shah was relieved. I think he was regarded by a lot of people, at the time of his death, as a very controversial character, as I said, because he was military, because he was likely to be a

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dictator, because he was supposed to be an American stooge much more than a British one. And, yes, there was a feeling, I suppose -- there was a feeling of relief. I was never aware that the Shah felt relief. But then, I wouldn't have known.

Nevertheless, in long talks with my ambassador, and with the American ambassador, and myself <?>, one never got that impression at the time.

Q. You didn't?

A. No. I think that the ... I'm not quite sure what went wrong at one time. There was a long ... there'd been long discussions in London and Washington, in which -- as one learned subsequently, when it was all over -- the two governments had been very worried about the relationship between the two embassies in Tehran. They were supposed to be in conflict all the time.

This was certainly not true after Henry Grady had gone, and Loy Henderson arrived. Loy Henderson and I remained intimate friends for a long time. Henry Grady was not a professional. He'd come from India. He was, I think ... he had a fairly large ego, and wanted to see himself.... He said to me on one occasion: "I was the savior of India; I shall be the savior of Iran." Well, for an ambassador, even of the

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greatest power, it's being a little bit splendid to say that sort of thing. No one can, least of all a foreigner in another country....

I suppose that the professional diplomat -- and I think this is a great advantage -- understands that he is a guest in a foreign country, and that he cannot -- or should not -- be influencing more than ... within very strict limits. Grady, I think, got it wrong. He was also, in a very early stage, first of all, I think somewhat, overcome by the presence of the Shah. Whole Imperial splendor. And secondly, I think disappointed -- he'd expected to find an American-style businessman, and he found something very different in front of him.

And the aid programs, and so on, were clearly not making the sort of impact that Grady would have liked to see them make. One hadn't got to go very far to see that it was either inadequate or a lot of the money, alas, was running away into fairly useless projects. Probably because of the scale -- it was not large enough to make it really work.

I think the other interesting thing is....

Q. The problem that existed between Grady and, perhaps, his British counterpart, would you characterize it more as sort of ideological or personalities?

A. Oh, I don't think it was ideological. It was more personality than anything else. Grady was a businessman turned diplomat. His English opposite-number, Sir Francis Shepherd, was an absolutely classical English diplomat of great patience and moderation and understanding, but not seeking drastic solutions. And perhaps, not understanding the impatience that Henry Grady showed on many occasions, as I understand. His was a sort of business school approach to things, which Frank Shepherd simply did not understand ... it was not in his character.

The great American fear, which had been fostered by Grady and been fostered by the rise of Khashani and things like that, was -- looking back over my papers -- certainly the fear of Communism, which was getting very, very great. The rise of the religious parties, the increasing influence of Khashani, people like <?> and others, all ... pushing towards what nowadays we perhaps would only regard as a sort of mildly socialist political movement, but 35 years ago was regarded as fairly revolutionary.

Q. What was it about Khashani and his influence that bothered...?

A. I think because undoubtedly the organized -- perhaps "gangs" is a strong word, but the degree of intimidation had

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grown a great deal in the streets of Tehran, and there had been disorders in Shiraz, in ... Mashhad, also, I think there'd been some troubles. Ahwaz was only later -- a little bit later. But yes, there were organized gangs, there was a degree of intimidation growing up, and ... the fear that everything was going out of hand.

I think, though, in two things: one, that it was going to go Communist. The Tudeh Party was the only organized political element in the country, on the one hand. On the other, a great fear of military dictatorship. This was very widespread in most places. A third element was certainly a reluctance of, if you like, the ruling classes in Iran to come to terms with what was happening and what was changing. A republican movement beginning to make itself heard. It was only, as I said, looking back over my notes, that I see how often we discussed the possibility of a republican movement, really....

Q. From what quarter was that sort of thing proposed?

A. Not being proposed, but it was a general feeling from the provinces and elsewhere that there was a strong republican movement. How it would ... who would come to lead it was very unsure.

Q. Certainly the National Front wasn't talking about....



A. The National Front was not talking at that time about anything like that at all. But the National Front was leading ... organizing a certain amount of the physical intimidation that was taking place. The Palace was not reacting very firmly. Razmeh was the major threat -- that the military would come back in. And I suppose that at that time -- in '51 -- it was still a possibility.

Q. Why was that considered a threat? I mean, it seems to me ... that if there was a military dictatorship, it would have been fine for the British and the oil company.

A. I'm not talking about the British and the oil company; I'm merely talking about public opinion. I think public opinion in Iran was very, very frightened.... They'd had a ... you know, there'd been some bad times, and I think they felt they were getting out of it, and....

Almost immediately after Mossadegh came into power, the Shah seemed relieved. I won't say he was relieved because Razmeh had been eliminated. He seemed relieved that someone who had proposed nationalization and been handed this was now in charge. I think he felt that he'd been let off the hook, in many ways. It was now up to the British, with perhaps some American backing, to deal with the problem. He never really liked problems. On the one hand, Mossadegh, on the other

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hand, the oil interests would have to deal with it, and he could be either a spectator or a judge. I think this suited him fine at that time; he could referee the match, without having to take too violent a part in it.

Q. Did he have any strong feelings towards ... or regarding the nationalization...?

A. No. Because when the single-article nationalization decree was put to him, and it was generally supposed that there would be a period for arguing, discussing it, redrafting it, and of course it was approved in two days. He never opposed that in any way. But ... that was a curious one, too, because not too many people were opposed. By people, I mean the foreign interests as well as the Iranian interests, including the very conservative forces in Iran -- were opposed to nationalization.

The rumor going around -- or the interpretation going around -- was that the oil in the ground would be nationalized. That this would be a tremendous thing for national dignity and national pride. But it would not basically affect the operation of the oil industry. And, curiously enough, almost everyone seemed to accept that interpretation: "What is in the ground is ours, can never be alienated, no foreigner can put his hands on it. It is ours." Great thing, and very good public relations.

But the operation of the industry was a matter for discussion and negotiation. I suppose everyone was looking for an out at the time.

Q. Did Mossadeq believe in this interpretation too?

A. I don't think Mossadeq believed in this interpretation. I'm not sure how deeply he went into it in the early days. It was certainly widely supposed that this would be the way it would work. And that the oil company really was.... I mean, in Western Europe there'd been lots of nationalization: coal industries, railways, all sorts of things. But really this was legally an act of sovereign right, and no one was going to even argue about it too much. And it would take a lot of the heat out of the problem. I suppose a lot of us believed it. I seem to remember thinking that this was one way out of it.

Because the other question had been Iranianization of the industry, and so on. By the time of ... by 1951, the middle of '51, of course that program had gone a long way ahead. Off the top of my head, there were some 35,000 people employed in Khuzestan and Abadan. And there were ... I think the number of Indians -- Indians and Pakistanis -- had been reduced to about a thousand. The number of Europeans -- very largely British, but a few others, Swedes and so on, mixed in

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-- had been reduced to about a thousand. And something like 30-plus thousand were Iranian.

But of course this did not cover the whole range of responsibilities. And I think that there was a very strong demand for many more Iranians in the higher echelons of management. And that was being discussed in a perfectly friendly way.

The other thing -- I confess, going back over my notes -- was how early after Mossadeq the question of 50/50 started to be discussed. As I mentioned last time we talked, it's very hard to decide what 100 is, when you start deciding 50/50. The old AIOC was, of course, an integrated operation from production right through to refining -- transport, refining, distribution, the lot. And at which point did you decide how much of that went into the hundred.

Q. Was there no sort of world market-price for crude oil which was at the port ready to be...?

A. Well, of course, the reason that Abadan was created -- at that time the largest oil refinery in the world -- was, of course, as you know, to split the light from the heavies. These days all the light seems to go east, and the heavies west. One "oil for the lamps of China" and the other one for the industry of western Europe. And, instead of transporting

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the whole lot and splitting it later, it was split in Abadan, in a fairly -- what nowadays we'd regard as a fairly crude operation. But it did split the light and the heavies.

At which point then did the...? First of all, what is the price of oil? We don't know. Even less then than now. There's a commodity market for not only the crude, but all the products. And how far did transportation come into the profit or loss account? And certainly by ... oh, the last quarter or something like that, of 1951, one was talking of the 50/50 relating to the Iranian operations of the industry, rather than the downstream operations. I'd say transport and distribution were being cut out, and further refining would have been cut out.

You know, looking back, it is so difficult to decide how much of the profits should be plowed back into modernization -- new fleets and all the rest of it -- and how much you distribute. But I think the idea at that stage was that the Iranian base-industry should be made autonomous, and that the 50/50 would be the profits after deducting the costs of extraction, and the market price at an Iranian port. So that was at least a formula, but of course, as I said the other day, there were so many formulas for deciding what 50/50 is.

The other one, of course, was what would the general view in discussions be; Mossadeqh and Iranian officials -- though



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nearly always discussions were carried on at the political level with Mossadegh, not with anyone else -- was that Iran certainly needed a large injection of money into the treasury. The Americans were very insistent on that. But their aid program was peanuts compared with the requirements. The Shah's own program needed large injections of money to make it work. And there had been discussions around how far back an adjustment in the oil company would go. It would probably have included at least '50 and '51.

And one was talking, I find in my notes, of an immediate injection of cash, which would be regarded as a preliminary deposit to be held in escrow against final settlement. You could write something like that, but immediately it proved to the Iranian government -- or something of the order of 18 million pounds. Which, 35 years later, may seem ridiculous, but was not ridiculous at that time.

It's ... I think it's a tragic story of almost total misunderstanding on both sides. Both being far too rigid in their views. Certainly a misunderstanding of what the oil industry was about. On the British -- or on the company's -- side, a belief in their almost godlike exclusivity in running the industry. Which almost immediately proved to be untrue, rather like, if you like, 20 years later, the Suez Canal.

Q. How much harmony or disharmony was there between the



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embassy and the company?

A. There were quite strong differences of emphasis, yes. The company maintaining a strictly commercial view, and the sanctity of contracts, and so on; and the embassy, inevitably, taking a far more political view of what the consequences could be diplomatically and socially, from the point of view of security and tranquility in the country and all the rest of it. Which the oil company regarded as quite basically irrelevant to their commercial operations.

The decision to take it to the International Court of Justice of course changed nothing much, except that the International Court felt unable to decide, as they had not.... Iran had specifically opted out, as they had every right to do. And the subsequent debate in the United Nations really did nothing more to shed any light on the subject, either.

I think we were quite wrong to consider that it was a matter of legal decision, when it was really a question of adjustment to the changing times, changing political circumstances, in an industry which was a world-wide one, that the conditions of that industry were changing everywhere. Iran was just a part of the picture. I think everyone's attention became totally focussed on it. And the fear, which was very evident in all the conversations and exchanges at that time, that if contracts could be broken

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simply by an act of sovereign will, why should we ever sign a contract anywhere around the world for dams, engineering, or any other major project involving huge sums of money?

I think that was also a misconception. Obviously contracts have to be observed. If you don't observe contracts, you never get another line of credit or anything else. It's a question of a delicate balance between buyer and seller, between consumer and provider, that obviously if neither side keeps to the rules, the whole thing breaks down. I think everyone understands that.

When you're a <?> strong political element, and you get close to a natural resource which is finite and limited, then I think you have to take political considerations into account in dealing with this.

Q. A number of studies which I've looked at, and especially this conference that was held at the University of Texas a few weeks ago, which I'm sure you're aware of, at which Denis Wright was there, Dr. Ferrier, and so on, it seemed to sort of come out that very, very early on, perhaps as early as June, 1951, at least a certain segment of the British diplomatic community had reached the conclusion that a proper settlement could not be reached with Dr. Mossadegh, and that perhaps patience had to be exercised, and sort of, to put it very crudely, he had to sort of be starved out. Then they

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discussed, you know, sort of opinions of Miss Lambton, and Dr. Zahner coming to Iran, and ....

A. Dr. Zahner coming to Iran, Robin Zahner coming to Iran ... <?> views of ... Bennet ... all these people, all these so-called -- well not, they were great experts on Iran, on the history of Iran, all came in on it.

I think, yes, I think there was a very strong view by, certainly by the third quarter of '51, that it was virtually impossible to come to an agreement with Mossadegh, and one would simply have to surge along until, I don't know, natural erosion took place. By which I think political erosion.

G. Well it seems that some bit of work was done to increase the rate of erosion, by the work that Zahner was doing, and ....

A. I think that's a fair comment, yes, I think quite a lot was done to increase the rate of erosion, to ... what was called "educating Iranian opinion" -- in other words, saying that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages in many ways, and that coming to some sort of composition <?> was essential for Iran. In view of the need to carry out a whole range of social and other modernization and development programs.

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I'm sorry about this, but my wife works downstairs, and we have telephones in every room. All on one system, but nevertheless....

Q. That's all right.

A. But it's.... Yes, I think there ... was a campaign of erosion.

Q. How soon did you ... at what stage did you start seeing the Shah personally? After Ambassador Shepherd left, or...?

A. Yes.

Q. When was that?

A. Well, he went home in -- I haven't got my notes with me here -- he must have gone home in, round about September or October '51. Then he came back briefly, then he left for good.

I had, like most of the young diplomats <unclear>, seen quite a lot of the Shah, because he used to entertain us at his various parties, and swimming parties, and so on. Since there were lots of pretty girls around, that was fine. And so, on the social level, yes, one had seen quite a lot both of him, and of the Empress, Sorraya.

Q. What sort of feeling did you get from him? I mean, his view of how ... of this question of erosion that we discussed? Was he expressing any sort of sentiments about it?

A. He was very careful not to. I'm not sure what sentiments he had. He was still, of course, entirely surrounded by courtiers, at least in everyday life. And in social life, family life, and so on, he saw very few people outside a limited number of the old courtiers and young diplomats, and basically Western diplomats, at that.

Q. Who were the sort of influential people around him at the Court? Mr. Ala was one, being the minister of Court.

A. Mr. Ala was ... Hossein Ala was the wise man, the moderate wise man, almost something between a schoolmaster and a father-confessor there. And he was a very moderate man, very reflective in what he said, not a man to influence events a great deal. But, no, I think that unfortunately there were people like the ... just, they were merely courtiers. Well, there were a lot of people like the Ghargouzious, and people like this. Who probably kept a lot of the truth from him.

There was still a fairly glittering social life going on,

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which was basically Court and diplomats more than anything else, and, as I said, a few of the great families. But of course, a lot of the great families, certainly in the south, and the tribal families, and so on, were not on particularly good terms with the Court anyway. He was pretty isolated. And very few people could get through to him.

I think this is a sad thing of all fairly absolute monarchies -- or indeed, any head of state, if hasn't got to be a monarchy, it can be a president -- you get increasingly isolated. You get people who say, "Bale, bale," all 'round the place; they're always bowing. Because you cannot confide in everyone, you can never let your guard down. You get a small number of decorative trustees whose job is to furnish the empty spaces around you, more than anything else.

Q. Who were those in those days?

A. Well, as I said, they were all the Ghargouzious, Foroughia, and people like that. All charming, all nice, all....

Q. How about Ernest Perron, and Hossein Fardoust, and...?

A. Ah. They were court jesters.

Q. I see.



A. They were not the glittering court of Louis XVI, or anything like that. They were the court jesters. Perron, I think was a curious character, because he had this great taste for intrigue all the time. And one was never quite sure what he was intriguing for or against or about, except he just liked intrigue. He interfered in a great many things. I don't think that money was his motivating force -- a lot of people said it was -- I don't think it was. I think because he was an unhappy little man, he liked being in the position that he considered to be a position of great influence and power, secret influence and power.

Which of course is a terrible disease. Why do you get spies or people belonging to secret societies? I think it's simply because they are inadequate and it gives them a feeling of power. I'm sure of a rare number of spies I have known, money has hardly ever influenced them, patriotism only occasionally, but the feeling of being a member of a secret society -- as you walk down the street, you sort of look around, and say: "If only they knew what I could do. What a terrific...." It's a sort of Walter Mitty complex.

Q. Did you have a feeling that the Shah trusted him, or...?

A. More than he should have, I should think, yes.

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Q. And how about Fardoust -- was he of any significance at that time?

A. I would not have thought so, no. Unfortunately the Shah, who probably understood that he was not getting as good advice as he could, and that sort of thing, looked all over the place to find balancing factors. And he would suddenly decide that if it wasn't Perron, it was one of the political officers in the American embassy, or a political officer in the British embassy, or anyone else -- that was the real, the honest man, who would tell him what was going on. And there would be a brief period when he would listen to no one else.

But he very seldom got a broad view. I think he was not very good at ... well, two things, I'm not sure. Typically Iranian as he was, I'm not sure how well he understood Iranians. I'm sorry to say it, but I think this ... some outside observers understood them better than the Shah did, in some ways. And, as I say, he never got a broad overview. What he got was little bits and pieces fed in by his current favorite and source of information.

Goodness only knows what the police were feeding into him all the time! But I imagine that, like most policemen around the world, they also live on plots and so on, and some of them ... if the intelligence, the security police, cannot invent sinister characters, they'd be out of a job, so they invent

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sinister characters. Or fairly harmless ones are made sinister.

I imagine they spent more of their time on the Tudeh than ... because the Tudeh were powerful. And increasingly so. And they could call out mobs. I suppose the feeling was that various parties, the Communist Party, and so on, were increasingly taking over from the Majles and from the elected politicians. It was the outside power or power groups or sort of lobbies representing various interests, either labor, religious, or whatever, which were taking over.

Q. Did you ever meet Seyyed Zia Tabataba'i?

A. A lot. I used to spend a lot of time with him. Of course, his name starts coming up from about the end of 1950 onwards -- as the elder statesman who would solve it all. Seyyed Zia I used to see a lot of. I used to go and spend weekends with him. He was extremely reluctant to be dragged into it. He managed to keep out....

Q. <?> outside....

A. All that time. He preferred to design water-gardens for the Shah, or something like that, rather than politics. He liked....

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Q. How do you figure that? I mean, he was obviously of great ambition. Why was he...?

A. I don't think ... I'm not sure that he did have great ambitions. If so, he expected to be called in without going through any of the political motions. He expected it to collapse, and then to be called in as the savior. He was politically astute, politically very conscious of what was going on in the country, and immensely reluctant to be dragged into it. Until the fruit was ready to drop off the tree into his mouth. I think this is really what it was.

Q. How would you summarize sort of his view of the situation at that time? Did he have any sympathies for nationalization? For Mossadegh? For the Shah's position? Or for Eurocommunism? What was his sort of main concern: the time?

A. Oh, his main concern was to see the process of reform properly financed and going through, with a strong government which would carry through the process of land reform, administrative reform, and better roads, schools, and infrastructure of industry, and so on, than anything else. And, of course, agriculture was his big thing -- he believed that was absolutely vital to the country, that it become self-sufficient as far as possible.

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And with his sort of poetic imagination, he always wanted to see, you know, schemes for growing tea, schemes for growing sugar. Everything <unclear> essential commodities were being imported. He was a bit of a utopian idealist, and he wanted to see the money and stability to make all these things possible.

I don't know how really interested he was in the oil industry, except as a source of income for the country. He never seemed to me to concentrate his attention a great, great deal on -- certainly not the technicalities of defining 50/50, defining what the cost of production was, which occupied a vast amount of a technician's time. There are tons of paper dealing with 30 different ways of estimating the costs of production.

Even labor relations, which were important, but in a sense almost secondary at that stage. They occupied tons of papers and files, down to the minutest detail. Clean overalls for drillers, and that sort of stuff -- which was really getting away from the problem down to small administrative details.

Q. But in the political arena, what...?

A. Political arena? Political arena?

Q. ....Seyyed Zia sort of...?

A. I think Seyyed Zia was basically an Anglophile, I would say. There's no doubt on that at all, as far as I know. And he wanted to see a stable, friendly relationship, a sort of British parliamentary system, a constitutional monarch -- no doubt of that, I think, at all. And it was only later that the Shah -- the Shah mistrusted him for a long time, because he was, I suppose, number one, the sort of thing he had in his head was agricultural reform and agricultural everything, which he loved.

The second one was a constitutional monarchy -- reduction of the Shah's powers. And parliamentary rule. This was what he was looking for. I mean, he thought that a partnership agreement with the British to exploit the oil industry for ... simply for providing income for these other things, was the right way about it.

Q. It seems that in some respects he and Mossadegh shared similar views.

A. They were not dissimilar. They were both, you know, both good farmers, both ran states well, both of them were very interested in agriculture -- they were in the actual practical, everyday application of agriculture.

Q. And constitutional monarchy.



A. Yes. Constitutional monarchy. I would imagine that, as time went on, Mossadegh must have been moving more towards a republican solution than a monarchical one, I would think. I don't think Seyyed Zia ever moved from a constitutional monarchy, which he regarded as the most stable one for most countries, and certainly for Iran. He believed that the tradition was there. Politicians were expendable -- they came and went -- but, thank God, there was always the monarchy there. As he was controlled by parliament, it was easier to make adjustments to changing conditions with a monarch than with a president.

Q. But he more or less kept out of....?

A. He kept out of all the day-to-day stuff when I was there with him. He was full of talk and advice. He saw a lot of people. He saw a lot more of the Shah later, of course, when he became his sort of head gardener, planning fountains and things for him. This is rather typical of this curious relationship. He still had great respect for the monarchy, believed it was an institution that should be preserved, but preferred to design parks and fountains than to give political advice.

Q. What about some of the other sort of elder statesmen of the time, such as Taghizadeh or Hakimi or...?

A. Hakimi was always sort of held in reserve, wasn't he, as a possible solution? I think that, you know, none of them had what in American terms one would call a "power base" in the country. So that they would have had to have been ... they'd have been nominees of the Shah. And, as such, their chances with an increasingly vocal and active Majles ... chances of forming a constitutional government were very, very small at any time.

This was it, I think, that no one understood -- I think the Shah did understand it, but he regretted it -- that really the time of an absolute monarchy was through, that the Majles had taken over, that it was moving towards a constitutional monarchy whether anyone liked it or not. So nominating people, because they were honorable gentlemen, was not good enough. You had to actually form a government and get a vote of confidence.

Q. What about Taghizadeh? Did you have...?

A. Yes, some.... Taghizadeh, I thought was one of the more promising candidates. But I don't think any of them had grasped the fact that they had to get 133 or whatever it was deputies on their side before they could succeed. Being nominated because all the others had failed was no answer at all.

I think this was probably, you know -- coming back to Razmara -- that it was realized -- believed anyhow -- that if Razmara succeeded in consolidating power, his power, then that would really be the end of the Majles. They would be nominated -- successive prime ministers and ministers would be nominated -- and the Majles would be expected to confirm in a nice, obedient manner.

It reminds me of Poland under Pilsudski, when I was in Poland. He used to walk into the parliament <unclear>, put his revolver on the Speaker's desk, look around, and say, "Well, now! Well, now!" And they all.... Literally, he used to take his revolver and put it on the Speaker's desk. And this was Pilsudski. Now Razmara could have been a Pilsudski in Iranian terms. I think this is what people were scared of.

And the power of the Majles -- however disorganized it was, however miserable, quite honestly, however miserable some of them were -- and for sale, quite a number of them -- nevertheless, that process had started, of an elected parliament. And there was no going back on it. I suppose, yes, a very strong military dictator.... I suppose it's just conceivable that Razmara would have stopped the clock -- he wouldn't have put it back -- he could have stopped the clock for a number of ... some time. He might even have got a

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degree of financial stability which ... I don't know what the effect would have been, but as the rest of the world was moving on -- the rest of the oil ... world oil industry was moving on, that clock would not have been stopped for very long.

Q. What about some of the other personalities, such as Mozzafar Baghaii, we've spoken of, did you ever meet him at the time at all?

A. Yes. Yes. Which of the Farmanfarmaians was am<bassador> -- one of them was ambassador in Paris, wasn't he? Another ... there were so many of them.

Q. I don't recall right now.

A. Yes.

Q. I'm talking about Dr. Baghaii....

A. Yes, Dr. Baghaii, yes.

Q. Of the Toilers' Party.

A. Oh, the Toilers' Party, yes.

Q. He was for a time considered sort of Mossadegh's number

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two man, early on, and then he sort of became closer to Ayatollah Khashani....

A. And then he....

Q. ....and finally there was a falling-out between them and ... including Makki and Mossadegh.

A. Including Makki and Mossadegh, yes. I ... I don't know why, they were ... presumably they were all, in their way, especially in labor relations and all, they were powerful figures with a basis of popular support. At some stages, more than Mossadegh himself had. I don't really know. The Toilers' Party at one time really seemed likely to develop into what today would be regarded as a labor party. I suppose that it had not ... it was not really ... It was not very strong, I would have thought, outside Khouzestan. It had a sort of slightly provincial air about it. And outside the south, I think if you got as far as Mashhad or something like that, I think they would, you know, ... it had become a very, rather ghost-like creature by the time you got seriously away from Khouzestan -- and Tehran as well.

Outside those two -- Tebriz and so on -- Tebriz had its own movements, but then they tended to be autonomous and local government ones rather than a national movement. Thirty-odd years ago, provincialism was pretty strong, as I'm sure you'd

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agree. You know, the mass in Shiraz hardly knew what the others were talking about, in terms of politics.

Q. What was the background for the consideration of Qavam as a replacement for Mossadegh?

A. Simply because Qavam was Qavam. Qavam-oz-Saltaneh after all was ... he was a very senior politician, a very senior family, a great figure. He was very crafty, very cunning, remarkably vigorous -- physically vigorous.

Q. Was he in Iran during that time? Or was he in Europe?

A. Yes. No, he was in Iran.

Q. He was in Iran.

A. I was looking at my notes, and I see one meeting with him, which I noted at the end of it that we "are surprised at his vigor." That we "talked furiously, smoked continuously, and drank manfully." See, he liked his whiskey.

Q. You met at his estate?

A. Yes. And ... well, he was after all an almost sort of Churchillian character in terms of Iranian politics.... No, I suppose I'd .... If there was a senior old one, I suppose



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<it> was Sarem-od-Dowleh -- someone like that. But these were almost historical figures, they had so little to do with what was very rapidly evolving Iran.

Q. How was his view different from Mossadegh's? On the question of resolving the oil dispute?

A. Oh, I think he wanted to resolve it by negotiation. I think he did not want a break. I think he felt it was pretty certain at this point that there was a transitional degree in which it was very important that senior Iranian staff should be trained, especially on the commercial side. I don't think he'd got to worry about the technical side. You can always buy technicians. But he was much more worried, as I recall, on the commercial side of selling the product, not producing it. You can always go and buy an engineer -- there are millions of them. But I think the commercial side he was worried about. But he saw an agreement which would have a transitional period, long or short -- not too long-- which would produce an effective Iranian oil industry.

Most of the arguments, whether with Qavam or anyone else, was where that industry began and ended. It was far more complicated ... it's still complicated.... Did it end at the port? Did it end at Abadan? Where did it end? What was the size of the cake which we were talking about? Before you started cutting slices.

And I don't think that either side knew this very much. The AIGC being, I suppose, probably the most integrated oil company of the seven sisters, because, after all, they did everything from <?> down to oil pumps in Australia. They did the whole lot, including the transporting and all the rest of it. The others really were not that integrated. And I suppose to have.... Had there been an agreement, where in the world they would have drawn the line in their accounting-books to decide: "This is yours and this is mine", I cannot imagine, because it....

Had it not been an integrated company -- totally integrated company -- it might have been easier.

Q. How eager was Gavam in assuming power?

A. Oh, he always liked power. Yes, I think he always liked power.

Q. But at this stage of history?

A. At this stage of history, I think that he had his reservations. He'd had a couple of unfortunate recent experiences where he'd been unable to stay in power. And I suspect he felt that he was not going to get the necessary support from the Palace that he would need. He'd need very

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strong support, if necessary, to not exactly rule by decree, but to adjourn the Majles indefinitely and that sort of thing. And I think he felt that he could not be effective without that kind of support.

He was a very crafty operator. And politically very sophisticated.

Q. You spoke in French together?

A. Yes. I was at some advantage, being more or less bilingual in French and English....

Q. It's said that the Americans were more interested in having him assume the premiership than the British. Was there sort of a difference of opinion on that? Or what roles did the various elements including the Shah, the British embassy, the American embassy, and others, play in bringing him to the fore?

A. I suppose there might have been marginally more American interest than British interest. We were honestly trying to distance ourselves from the idea that "nothing happened in Persia (as one tended to call it) without the British having organized it." And I certainly, at the time when I was in charge, I was very, very anxious to get away from that.

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I had one classical example of it. When I was in charge, I had my Farsi teacher, who was a most distinguished-looking man -- I can't remember his name, but anyhow ... with all the traditional respect that the pupil has towards his teacher -- we lived on that basis. And he used to arrive, and I used to take my lessons very early in the morning -- well, 6 o'clock, something like that -- and we'd walk in the rose-garden together while he taught me Farsi proverbs. The way you remember it is by learning poetry and proverbs, you know....

I probably still remember them, too: <Persian>, and that sort of thing. And one day, the Gholam, the head-guard, came along and there was a crowd outside making a noise. This was about six in the morning. I said, "What's all that?" "Well," he said, "it's your teacher." And I said, "But that kind, distinguished person...." "Oh," he said, "it's his clients." I said, "I beg your pardon? His clients?" "Oh yes," he said, "he comes here in the morning. They know he comes to see you every morning. So he says to the various petitioners who come to him: 'For three tomans I can fix you up' or 'No hope for you' or 'It's a very complicated case, I'll talk to the British.'" And he used to collect about 10 or 15 tomans at the gate every morning.

Now, being an intelligent fellow he knew that all these people had nothing to do with us. It could have been over water, it could be a divorce, it could be anything. He knew

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that at least one or two in ten come right. So his reputation was fine.

And then, an hour later, when the lesson was over, he used to come out, like a priest almost, addressing the crowds: "I've fixed your case." <or> "You'll have to come back and see me again."

And I was furious about this, you see. Not about the teacher, but about us. Obviously there's really no.... You shouldn't treat the British embassy this way, as a sort of underground police station, or whatever. And so I had to say to him one day, "Look, I'm sorry, but I've decided to take no more lessons." "Why?" So I told him why, and he said, "But what have I done to hurt you?" I said, "Well, personally nothing, but I really think it's very bad for the British embassy that this should happen every day. This crowd in the street. Petitioners. And you know damn well that...."

And he said, "I've helped you with roses, I've helped you with your Farsi -- not enough time -- in another five years, you'd be all right. And everyone knows that I am your friend. Everyone knows that I can talk to you. If I make a little money for my family, it does you no harm. I'm in a certain danger, because everyone knows I'm pro-British. Everyone knows I'm your friend. What are you doing to me?"

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And of course this was the sort of atmosphere which existed very easily. And he was heartbroken. I used to send him presents, when I'd stopped having lessons from him -- I was too busy by then and I knew it would take me several years to be competent in Farsi, so....

This was, of course, this unfortunate business that everything was decided by the British, American, occasionally Russian embassies -- nothing else mattered. And this was ... I suppose it isn't ... it wasn't then any pw a weakness: passing the blame to someone else. Certainly <it wasn't> so much strictly an Iranian characteristic, because the French -- to whom I'm devoted, having a French wife -- always tend to say: "We are betrayed!" when everything goes wrong. "Nous sommes trahis. Not us! Someone else has betrayed us."

And this was a weakness in trying to negotiate what was after all -- would have been and was -- a turning point in the modern history of Iran.





# HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
IRANIAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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MIDDLETON, GEORGE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
IRANIAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Narrator: Sir George Middleton

Date: October 16, 1985

Place: London

Interviewer: Habib Ladjevardi

Tape no: 3

Q. Can you sort of recall the events which were taking shape in July, 1952, when Mossadegh wanted to take over the portfolio of minister of war, and the Shah was not inclined to pass this on to him, and Mossadegh resigned. What discussions ... what took place? How did it happen that Gavam was the one chosen to come back and try to take power?

A. Well, I think that, not surprisingly, the strains on Mossadegh were beginning to tell. And he was becoming more and more Messianic, if you like. More and more, he was the only person who could handle the situation, in his own view. He was becoming less and less amenable to outside influence, argument, or anything else. The economic situation was certainly getting a great deal worse. The political one could not remain unresolved forever. The Shah was more and more disinclined to take action. He was also aware that his

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own position was getting weaker and weaker.

Mossadegh. Yes, I think Mossadegh realized that he ... there had to be a dictatorship, and he was the dictator. He would take the lot over.

I think before July '52 -- a little bit earlier that year -- there had been discussions -- one can't pinpoint actual individuals or days, but it all comes back into a sort of general amalgam of different conversations -- where possibly Seyyed Zia, certainly Qavam and others, had suggested that the Shah would have to call on the army at some stage. To inaugurate a, maybe temporary, but nothing is very temporary ... a very strong government that would restore order, get industrial relations going again, get the treasury working.

And the Shah had said, in probably early '52, that he was not sure that he could count on the police. And he'd said that in conversation ... possibly with the American ambassador or someone. And there even doubts as to how far ... until almost certainly the end of ... the beginning of '52, the Shah was perfectly convinced that he could at any time call on the army, and there'd be no problems.

But that position started to erode quite rapidly in '52. I should say that by July there was no single, very stable element to exercise authority. The Shah was aware, I'm

sure.... He'd wanted to send Ashraf away; he wanted to send Sorraya and the children away. He'd been told that if he did, it would be the beginning of real trouble. He'd be seen to be pulling out and running. And at that point there could be serious outbreaks of disorder, which ... largely, I should think, organized by the Tudeh, but which would nevertheless have been quite spontaneous, because to see the monarch running away would have been terrible.

There was Mossadegh.... There had to be ... there had to be the installation of a strong man.... We never thought it would be Khomeini (Zahedi ?), but that is the way it was happening all the time.

Q. But then, I'm interested to see ... (by) what process it was decided to bring Gavam rather than ... I don't know -- someone else.

A. I think, again, he was the most astute elder statesman available. He was also willing ... to try. By then, very few people wanted to stick their necks out. Had I been a senior Iranian politician, I would not have stuck my neck out at that stage. There were too many uncertainties ... there was too much.... The one real source of authority, the Shah, was unwilling to exercise it. You had to be either pretty foolhardy, or fairly elderly and fairly crafty, and you had to be a Gavam to be willing to undertake it -- not many



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people would have.

Certainly Seyyed Zia -- no question at all of his wanting to get into that sort of a mess.

Q. And how do you assess the fact that he to let go so quickly? I mean, there were only two or three days.

A. Three days, I think, something like that. Well, because there was no hope of getting a vote in the Majles of any kind.

Q. How about the crowds and the uprising?

A. Oh yes. It was all pretty well orchestrated. I don't ... see, it was a terrible vacuum. Who else could have come ... there was no one. Had there been a strong alternative leader, I think the crowds, which were very volatile in Tehran anyway, might not have been there. But it's the feeling that all that had been done until then: the reassertion of the power of the Majles, which hadn't been seen since whatever it was -- 1906 or something like that -- was about to be overthrown again. And I think another sort of Razmara complex -- that the Shah would appoint a dictator, who would go in by force and take over.

Razmara was suspected of being that person. Instant

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opposition appeared. No one, but no one, was willing to ... I don't think he'd find a team of ministers -- minister of the interior or minister of economy -- I don't think he could find anyone who was willing to support him. And by then, I imagine that the reports he was getting from the police and the army were not altogether reassuring.

Q. Apparently there was some discussion about perhaps bringing the Qajar Dynasty back.

A. Oh, there's always been....

Q. ....that particular point.

A. That particular point, yes. No, I think that was.... Oh yes, it was always there. I'm trying to remember which of them it was -- there were not many respectable ones available, but I think what it shows is that that had been there for some while, and the real sort of political bankruptcy of the Pahlavis. Really, because ... well, the Qajars were history -- there was no great Qajar figure around. A couple of Zands around still, but I mean it was really, more than anything else, the bankruptcy of the Pahlavis.

Q. There was, I believe, a Hamid Qajar here in London.

A. Yes, there was a Hamid Qajar here, that's right.

Q. How serious a consideration was that? Was that something in passing, or was there really...? I mean, you were in Tehran, were you asked for your opinion as to ...?

A. No, no. You couldn't. I mean, that would have been treason, practically. But, no, I think it was the feeling that the Shah had to go, the Pahlavis had to go, and here was the ... a symbol of legitimacy who could come back. Not politically colored in any way, particularly. But I suppose one, you know, one could go back and look for a Stuart in this country or a descendant of George Washington, or something, in America. In times of great crisis, you tend to go back to legitimacy.

Q. There was Prince Abdorreza, who had just come back from Harvard a few years before, and he was involved with the Plan Organization, and so forth.

A. He was indeed, yes.

Q. There were some rumors that Mossadegh ... that he had his own ambitions and that Mossadegh was opposed to his sort of becoming ... replacing the Shah. How much truth is there in that?

A. Well, he was highly Americanized and, in a way,

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denationalized, and I think that.... Yes, Mossadeqh had met him. I think he had been in Tehran, he had been in Tehran, he had met him -- and I think neither liked the other at all. One was the modern technologically-educated Iranian, the other was the old hill-farmer still beating away on his prejudices.

Yes. I remember him. He had ... I'm trying to remember ... put a face to him.... Because I used to hear from him at intervals, and get Nowruz cards, and things, for a long time, from him. He sent me a carpet once as a consolation prize for being thrown out, I think.

Q. So there wasn't anything serious... <unclear>

A. No, no. I think that the mere fact that people were talking of finding a Gadjar to take over was really the sign that the Pahlavi had proved ineffective....

Q. How about Ali Reza? Did you meet him or know much of him?

A. No.

Q. He seemed.... He had a reputation of being a strong figure, didn't he?

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A. He had a reputation of being a strong figure, yes. I hardly knew him, but ... I don't think ... I don't think any of them had a hope, then. I really don't. Because the Toilers' Party and the Tudeh, and so on, had really totally discredited the idea of monarchy. I'm not sure that ... and it never came back.

Almost the last nail in the coffin was Persepolis. Because this was sort of Louis XIV folly.

Q. You mean in 197- ?

A. Yes, whenever it was, yes. This was almost the last thing. It was a proof that the Pahlavi Dynasty was frivolous; it was not serious.

Q. Were you there? Were you invited?

A. No, no. Oh, no. Lots of my friends were, but, ... The French, I think, really overdid it -- too much icing on the cake -- and it was the final proof that they were not ... not serious people. They had become absolutely bemused and corrupted by the idea of the divine right of kings.

Hell, there'd never been such a feeling of divine right of kings since <unclear> when, ... You know, you can think you're the chosen of God on earth, but you shouldn't really

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start thinking you're God. When you do, you're in trouble.

Q. Did you ever meet that police chief that was ...  
eventually killed -- Afshartous?

A. No, I don't think I did, no. No.

The assassinations, or <unclear> attempts on the Shah, there  
was Razmare, there was Hazeri, who was assassinated ....

Q. Hazeri?

A. Yes, Hazeri, who was assassinated. And one ... it doesn't  
seem to me entirely spontaneous. I would not have thought it  
was in the Iranian character to assassinate people without  
its being organized.

Q. Apparently Kashani's group, I mean the Fada'iyan-e Eslam,  
were....

A. I should think the Fada'iyan-e Eslam were probably ...  
must have been organized by then, to give the motivation for  
it, because it is not, I would have thought, in the Iranian  
character, the sort of violence you get in the streets here,  
or in Chicago, or anywhere else -- I would not have thought,  
on the whole. And I've seen ... I've sat in my ancient  
Rolls-Royce in the middle of large demonstrations and



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stone-throwing, and that sort of thing. And on the whole, it was not given to great physical violence.

It's always seemed to me something in the Persian character -- I say Persian, rather than Iranian -- the Persian character that physical aggression was a long way away from that character. They don't even touch ... they would hold hands, but that's about the limit to which it goes. There is a certain physical austerity in the Persian character. And it just seems to me totally alien to what would normally happen.

Q. How about Khashani? Did you ever meet Ayatollah Khashani?

A. I must have met him, yes, but I can't, ... He was ... there were a couple of people at the embassy who knew him much better. We had a labor advisor who knew him quite well.

Q. Was there any attempt to try to sort of influence his way of thinking about things, and perhaps get his ... solicit his assistance in coming to a solution?

A. More on the purely industrial side than anything else. I gather that ... I seem to remember that the labor men had quite good relations with him. They used to have a lot of talks about Iranianization, education, and so on. And trying to look ahead, well, one could see in a quite short future,

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an industry which was at least 99% Iranian,...

Q. This was with Kashani, that he had these talks?

A. With Kashani, yes. He was interested in the whole of that side of it.

Q. Who was this? Heard <sp?> was it, at that time? Or the labor man...?

A. Yes. I think it was Ed Heard <sp?>, yes. And he was our sort of contact-man with Kashani.

Q. Was the fact that he was sort of.... I mean, pretty soon after the July incident, both Kashani and Bagha'i broke from Dr. Mossadegh. That must have sort of been a hopeful sign to the British that erosion is finally ... taking place.

A. Oh, yes. Very much so. When Kashani and Bagha'i broke -- at this point, I think a lot of people thought: "This is it!" You know, "It's now going to go very fast." there was still a vacuum. No one had any ideas who the next person might be. It was one of the problems.

Q. How did the idea of General Zahedi gradually develop?

A. He'd been talked of for quite a long time. He'd put

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himself forward, more or less.

Q. He'd put himself forward?

A. He'd sought contacts with both the Americans and ourselves. He had arranged a fairly clandestine meeting with Sir Francis Shepherd. The Americans, I think, had refused to see him, but he'd seen one of the American political officers. Sir Francis Shepherd saw him, I saw him -- out in the country, and all the rest of it....

Q. How did he strike you? The first time you saw him?

A. He struck me as one of the rare people who knew what he wanted to do at that time.

Q. Really?

A. And was willing to have a program and go ahead. He seemed to be a man of considerable decision.

Q. How early did ... when did you actually see him?

A. Well, I ... let's see: Sir Francis Shepherd must have seen him -- I'd have to look up the record of the interview -- in lateish in '51. Something like September.

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Q. '51?

A. <Yes.> I saw him ... it must have been early '52. I remember I was partridge-shooting, and I must have seen ... on the occasion of seeing him, I was shooting partridge.

Q. Would it be possible for you to describe this interview in detail? That is, the first time you saw.

A. I've got the full record ... I need to refresh my memory on it.

I think he was a man who was regarded as fairly unscrupulous. And ... but at least -- a rare quality then -- he knew where he wanted to go and what he was willing to do.

Q. What was that?

A. Hm?

Q. What was that?

A. To take over, with or without the support of the Majles, with, hopefully, the support of the police and the armed forces, and restore the budget, restore more normal working conditions.

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Everything had slowed down terrifically by 1952. So many people had not been paid -- civil servants hadn't been paid, police hadn't been paid, and so on. And he was willing to go in, seek substantial credits -- there were still 18 million Pounds on the table, which would have seen him through quite a bit of time. And the Americans, at that time, were willing to negotiate a line of credit for him.

And he was looking for a strong government, normality, and, of course, he was loyal to the Shah -- to the concept of the Shah. I'm not sure ... I think he thought the Shah was far too damn weak, and that he could do a better job. But he was loyal to the concept of the monarchy. Like a lot of people. Like Seyyed Zia, people like that. That is an institution, it should be preserved. And either the Shah, as a person, had to be reduced to a fairly decorative role, or he had to be strengthened so he would play the role of a strong constitutional monarch -- perhaps a bit more than a constitutional -- executive monarch, if you like.

I think there was a great fear among a lot of senior Iranians, and the upper classes, and so on, that really, the oil industry, the oil crisis, and so on, were one thing, but what they were really seeing -- and they were right -- was that the whole institutions of Iran were at threat. And that no one quite knew what would take its place if those institutions were destroyed.

And by the time it got to '52, I think this was a very profound feeling. Certainly ... openly speculating as to what would happen after the Pahlavis. <unclear>, but what happens after the Pahlavis? Without thinking of, you know, any of the things that have happened since then. That this was the end of an era, I think was widely felt by ... certainly by ... oh, quite early, in '52, certainly by July.

And it was this sort of very insecure feeling of the end of an era, end of an institution -- it's a very upsetting one, it's like being in a quicksand -- you don't know where you're going. Solutions come and go. None of them seem the right one. I imagine it felt like this in the French Revolution, or in the Russian Revolution of 1906, or something like that. You knew there was no stable realm <?>.

Q. Did you and the Americans talk to each other about your interest, your contacts with Zahedi? Was this something that...?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q. How about with the Shah? Did he ... was he aware?

A. He was aware. He was aware, yes. But I imagine he would have got more from Zahedi and the various intermediaries they



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had then directly from either the Americans or ourselves.

Q. But there was a direct link?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Between Zahedi....

A. ...and the Shah. Oh, yes, I'm sure of that.

Q. Was his son, Ardeshir, a major player at the time?

A. Too young.

Q. I mean, he wasn't being an intermediary or anything like that?

A. Ardeshir Zahedi, when we met later, many years later, he said his only job was to climb up a tree, sit there, with another fellow he could see, 100 yards away, to say ... to warn them whether I was being followed when I came to see his father. I said, "I remember a lot of boys in trees." He said, "I was one of those boys."

Q. But it's amazing that there was such a long period during which Zahedi was being considered, and yet ... and it was in Persian newspapers that, you know, he's planning ... and so

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on, and yet Mossadeh didn't take any steps. He could have arrested them, he could have -- I don't know -- he could have shot them, he could have....

A. Arrested him, shot him, anything. But he, alas, moved into a dream world. I'm sorry to say it, because I had considerable respect and affection for him. But he really had become a megalomaniac ... he was....

Q. Mossadeh?

A. Mossadeh. He was very, very hard to have any contact -- intellectual contact -- with him....

Q. Could you describe one of the meetings, that would sort of lend ... sort of describe this conclusion you've come to? I mean, how was he behaving that you came to this conclusion?

A. Well, the conversations were getting longer and longer. Three hours would be quite normal, which for a prime minister is ridiculous. We would then start at any time from about 1900 onwards, and go into the whole thing -- we'd been ... we'd done it a hundred times. We'd then go into the wickedness of the oil company. We could never really get him to talk about where, what we could do next. I could never get him to concentrate on a single fact, such as -- by then, as I said, we had something like 18 million Pounds on the

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table.

The Americans, and others, had fall-back and rescue missions, which he was aware of -- or at least his ministers were aware of. You could never get him down to concrete matters. It was all by then an almost obsessive view about the whole problem. And that the only way do it it <was> for everyone to go away, shut down the industry -- it doesn't matter -- finish it all. Everyone go away, and we'll be very happy growing melons.

Really ... he had become quite, quite obsessive. And the sheer length of these inconclusive meetings was terrible. Fairly exhausting, and totally inconclusive. Then one had, of course ... half the world press was sitting there at the time. There were the embargo on the sale of Iranian oil, and that sort of thing. It was very.... But none of this, none of this could be discussed.

Q. Why? He didn't want to discuss them?

A. He didn't want to discuss the oil. All he wanted to talk about was good and evil -- the wickedness of the oil company, the wickedness of all the foreign.... All the foreigners were against him, all of them. And ... no, he had rather lost control of his mental processes by July-August '52.

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Q. I mean, there are people who say that what you describe as sort of his megalomania and loss of mental processes as, in fact, different objectives and points of view. He considered this as purely a political problem, while you people perhaps saw it as more economic and commercial -- that's the reason you could not ... communicate.

A. Well, one of the reasons one couldn't communicate, as I was saying, he could only see it in terms of good and evil, of black and white. He couldn't see it in terms of problems which possibly had solutions. All problems do. And obsessive to that degree. So that when one was instructed to try and talk about making credits available, and that sort of thing, it was irrelevant to him.

And I suspect that the conversations he had with the Shah must have been very difficult, also, because the practical problems of the day, the practical problems of a weakening economy, of troubles because people were not being paid, and salaries not being paid, were irrelevant to him. He had become -- I don't know what you'd say -- star-struck, in a way. He could only just see this one visible problem, get rid of everyone, give us our industry, "Go away."

Q. Were there any advisors around him which you could try to sort of present your point of view to him? Was Fatemi a figure yet, Hossein Fatemi? Was he...? Was he appointed

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foreign minister at that time?

A. He was appointed at that time, yes.

Q. What sort of man did you find him to be? He's become quite a sort of ... controversial, in some ways, historical figure at the moment. And it's interesting to ask someone who has actually met him to give an assessment of him.

A. Fatemi was more like a Moscow-trained ideologue, to me, than anything else. He actually knew the arguments. One felt he had had a sort of agit-prop education. Instead of just getting a lot of emotion -- hot or cold -- and very formless, he actually had a form on it. He knew what he was talking about. He had facts and figures. Therefore, basically a far more worthy opponent than pure sentiment, which is a very distressing thing to run against. You can appreciate the sentiment, but there's no way out of it.

Fatemi knew his facts and figures, and had solutions in mind. Most of them were probably unacceptable to the British at that time, but nevertheless, one could talk sense -- talk facts.

Q. So how is it that that didn't evolve into a solution?

A. Well, until (when did I leave? I left on the first of

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November) the middle of October -- very late -- there still seemed to be possibilities that we could get down to discussing concrete problems. I think probably, in looking back, time was not on anybody's side, because I think the political pressures were far too great. Or the emotional pressures were far too great. But, yes, one had ... somewhere between sort of July and October one had actually started to discuss a series of fairly practical answers to things. All the things like the extension of credits, back payments on account, 50/50 of something -- all started to be discussed in fairly reasonable terms again.

Q. So, we could perhaps end this interview if you could just describe the events preceding the breakage of diplomatic relations. I mean, what brought that on, and how was it communicated to you?

A. Well, I'm sorry to say that it had turned into ... long elements of farce at this time. There had been a series of exchanges of notes in which various deadlines were laid down for the payment of moneys due by the ex-oil company, and so on, which were then answered, saying, "We do not recognize any of these claims" and "What do you mean, ex-oil company?" and all the rest of it. What about their claims? There was great argument as to whether it could be built on a government-to-government basis. Whether....



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A certain number of lawyers started to give advice. Whether the majority shareholding of the British government made it an intergovernmental one, or simply still a private commercial case between a government and a private company.

And then there was a deadline laid down -- and here I would have to go back on exactly the terms of it -- for the lifting of the embargo on Iranian oil, which of course, the AIUC -- or NIOC by then -- had bought in various ports around the world, with tankers being obtained. And all these had to be lifted by a certain date. We then started to exchange on the whole irate and not very constructive notes dealing with certain specific points, like embargoes on the sale of Iranian oil.

And then I was given a deadline for answers to two or three of these notes, or there would be a break in relations. I went to see the Shah, who said he hoped that this was not to happen, and that we could meet the deadlines. London could not meet the deadlines, and I was.... Then in a very vague way I was sent for by the ministry, went down to see little Afshar, who was head of the British Commonwealth section, and handed a note saying that in view of the unsatisfactory response of the British government, relations would be interrupted on such and such a date, and would I please leave in five days, or whatever it was. OK. And the Iranian mission in London was being withdrawn. That was fine.

Then after that there was complete hiatus while one went through all the technicalities of -- we named the Swiss, the Iranians named the Swedes or someone in London. After that, it's a question of packing baggage, and very little time for anything else while you pack up your files, pack up your baggage, send the children away, and all the rest of it. Arrange for laissez-passeurs, arrange to go to Baghdad. And this was, you know, about eight or nine days of absolutely desperate activity producing nothing very much.

And then we were asked to leave before dawn -- of course we had this large convoy of cars, of which I've shown you the photographs -- to avoid any public disorders. We were accompanied, of course, by the Swiss ambassador, who was in charge of British interests then.

And so, flying a large Swiss flag, we set off in a large convoy -- we'd sent most of the people out the night before -- on the road to Qazvin, and left before dawn. And had decided.... The servants had gone and everything else. I'd arranged to have sort of a picnic breakfast in a ditch on the road to Qazvin, where.... At which point, the sort of relief ... the tremendous pressures that months had taken off, and it had become a sort of picnic.

We were sitting there, and the Belgians arrived. And the

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Americans arrived, and the Italians arrived, and the French arrived. And finally, on the road to Qazvin there was a sort of huge diplomatic party, which was absurd. By then it was just about dawn -- very early -- very cold. And I remember one American arriving with about a gallon of dry martinis, the Belgians arriving with bacon and eggs, and all the rest of it.

And as we were all sort of saying good-bye, and about to set off -- and by then it must have been just after dawn -- a car from the ministry arrived. Oh, of course we had our military escort and a member of ... I forget who it was -- it wasn't Afshar -- it was one of the junior members of the ministry, to make sure we were OK. Very well done, very polite and nice. When a car arrives -- and I think it was Afshar inside -- with a message for me to deliver to the British people.

We then had our last sort of confrontation on the Qazvin road, and I said I was sorry, I could not deliver a message to the British people. In fact, I couldn't even receive a message and the only people who could would be the Swiss, who were in charge of British interests. In any case, I certainly could not deliver a message to the British people. I was not an elected representative; I was nothing at all, I was an official -- an ex-official, now that I was leaving.

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And we had this fairly ridiculous exchange, handing envelopes up and down.

Q. Was this Meftah or Afshar?

A. Meftah I think. And finally ... I mean, of course, all these diplomats were around, they nearly all of them with cameras, and one thing and another -- verging on the ridiculous, I'm afraid. However, finally, I think about the nineteenth time, I let the envelope drop. And so, someone picked it up. And that was the end of that one, and off we went. Having drunk about two gallons of American dry martinis.

Q. Well, on that note....

A. But I was very sad, because I had a great affection for the country and the people, and wished I could have spent longer, learned the language properly, and I'd planned, you know, several happy years there. But it never happened. Nothing but good memories of it -- basically.

Q. Well, thank you very much for allowing me to record your memoirs.

A. Well, thank you.